



Senator Sheila Kuehl

23rd District Newsletter • June 2006

The Rocketdyne Test Site: What Can Be Done

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*The fourth of four articles
By Laura Plotkin, District Director*

Over the course of three previous articles on the Rocketdyne test site, I examined the past and present history of the site, the defeat of proposed legislation to clean up the site, and the history of health risks associated with the site. In this article, I come to the "what next?" portion of this journey--the really difficult part. The first three articles have made it abundantly clear that there have been serious accidents and unsafe practices at the site that have caused the release of toxic contaminants into the air, soil and water over many years.

In addition, you have learned that four separate health studies from 1990 to 2006, conducted by the California Department of Health Services (DHS) and UCLA, have identified a higher incidence of certain types of cancers associated with the activities conducted at Rocketdyne which continue to put the people who lived and/or worked there, their children, and the people who live there now, at risk. You have learned that Senator Kuehl, over her 11 years in office, so far, has authored four different pieces of legislation which would have guaranteed an EPA-standard clean-up at the site and/or kept it from being used for housing in the future until the clean-up was effectuated. All of these legislative efforts were defeated by Boeing's strong lobbying efforts. Because of the failure of these legislative attempts, and in spite of the obvious "no brainer" concept of not letting children live or play on a nuclear meltdown site, the area could still be released for unrestricted residential use. That means that houses could be built there and people might not even know what they are buying into--on many levels--the prospect of which gives new meaning to the term *caveat emptor*.

When I first started working for Senator Kuehl, she was in the state Assembly. I remember a phone call at the district office from someone who was moving into the area near Rocketdyne and wondering if it was safe to buy a house in Simi Valley because he had heard about some concerns regarding the Rocketdyne site. I called the Department of Health Services in Sacramento to check it out. The person on the other end of the phone said, "Well I wouldn't buy a house there!" That was my first introduction to "problems" at the site. All these years later, Senator Kuehl is still working to get a decent level of clean-up there.

Although there has been some community dissatisfaction in the past with the adequacy of regulatory action taken by the agencies who are our potential allies in this effort, those agencies are a substantial part of our hope for the future. The state Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) and the State and Regional Water Quality Control Boards and the Department of Health Services were created to protect public health. We rely on them to be vigilant and to do their jobs. It has been frustrating that, at times, it has appeared that they were not devoted to being a part of the solution. In addition, we need

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Kuehl Legislation to Improve Health

In addition to moving California toward a system of universal health insurance for the state, Senator Kuehl is authoring other bills related to health care and health insurance which are making their way through the Legislature.

SB 1448: Health Care Coverage Initiative

SB 1448 creates a Health Care Coverage Initiative to modestly expand health care coverage for uninsured Californians not currently eligible for public programs such as Medi-Cal and Healthy Families. The program will be funded as part of California's recent Medi-Cal Hospital Financing Waiver, which included \$540 million (\$180 million per year for 3 years) of federal money, conditioned upon enactment of the coverage expansion.

Under SB 1448, the initiative is structured as a kind of block grant available to counties to expand access through their existing network of safety net health care providers. The program is intended to help stabilize the safety net system through the provision of health care coverage to uninsured Californians - in a way that increases access to quality health care, improves health outcomes and creates efficiencies in the delivery of health services.

The measure has passed the Senate and will be heard next in the Assembly Health Committee.

SB 1471: the California Community Sexual Health Education Act

SB 1471, the California Community Sexual Health Education Act, establishes standards for state funded and administered sexual health education

programs. Though the state has established standards for sexual health education taught in our schools, similar requirements do not exist for state funded community based sexual health education programs. This bill addresses that problem by establishing guidelines that ensure that state dollars go only to programs that are bias free, medically accurate and age appropriate, in addition to other requirements. The measure assures that California will provide the scarce funding now available for teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease prevention only to programs with demonstrated effectiveness in preventing pregnancy or risk of receiving a sexually transmitted disease, not to those which have been shown to be ineffective.

The measure, which is sponsored by Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union, will soon be heard on the Senate Floor. It will then go to the Assembly where it will be reviewed by policy and fiscal committees before going to the Governor for his signature or veto in August.

SB 1704: California Health Benefits Review Program

SB 1704 extends the sunset date for the California Health Benefits Review Program (CHBRP), an independent program administered through the University of California. Using the expertise and scientific resources of the University of California, the program evaluates legislation that expands or contracts specific insurance benefits provided by health plans and insurers by looking at the medical efficacy, the cost-effectiveness and the public health impacts of any proposed legislation. After analysis, the program

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Senator Kuehl spoke about healthcare issues at the 29th Convention of the Congress of California Seniors (CCS) on May 23, 2006. CCS is a statewide nonprofit education and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the lives of seniors and their families.

Senator Kuehl is pictured with John Fleming, who represents the Retired Employees of Los Angeles County at the Congress of California Seniors.

23rd Annual California Strawberry Festival

Benefits Local Charities

By Hilda Garcia, Field Representative

This year's California Strawberry Festival brought thousands of families to the city of Oxnard to celebrate (and, of course, to eat strawberries and everything that can be made from strawberries). Honoring Oxnard's rich agricultural history, the tasty two-day festival pays tribute to the region's prized multi-million dollar strawberry industry, which spans more than 8,500 berry acres. The California Strawberry Festival has been ranked among the nation's top outdoor family festivals.

More than 50 food booths appealed to the heartiest appetite, featuring strawberry pizza, strawberry choco-tacos, strawberry egg rolls, strawberry cotton candy and more. Whether in shortcake or funnel cake, dipped in chocolate, or ice blended, strawberries were the celebrated fruit.

The festival also featured entertainment including live performances, children's activities, and arts and crafts. Hardcore festival-goers tested their love for strawberries by participating in the Strawberry Tart Toss and Strawberry Shortcake Eating Contests. Two new attractions, the Strawberry Promenade, "an interactive and imaginative take on all things berry", and the Star Berry Hunt, "an interactive quest for berry knowledge" were introduced at this year's festival.

Best of all, local charitable organizations benefit from the proceeds generated by the Festival. Earlier this year, the Executive Board of the non-profit California Strawberry Festival awarded a total of \$50,000 raised from last year's California Strawberry Festival to 23 non-profit groups within the extended Ventura County community. Since the Festival's inception in 1984, more than \$2 million dollars has been raised for charitable groups.

Beneficiaries of the 2005 California Strawberry Festival allotment program include: the Boys & Girls Club of Ventura, the Boys & Girls Club of Oxnard/Port Huene, Buenaventura Swim Club, Camarillo Hospice, Camarillo Noontime Optimist Club, Casa Pacific, City Impact, Eagles Soccer Club, Food Share, Future Leaders of America, Gull Wings Children's Museum, Habitat For Humanity, Interface, Learning for Life, Nathaniel Ryan Klopmanbaergelman Fund, Navy League, New West Symphony, Oxnard Public Library, Rotary Club of Oxnard, ProCare Foundation, Rotary Club of Port Huene, Smart Start Child Development Center, and Livingston Memorial Visiting Nurses.



A recent study by the International Festival and Events Association (IFEA) estimates that the yearly Festival economic impact to the community is an astounding \$7.5 million dollars. Congratulations to the California Strawberry Festival Executive Board for putting on another fabulous event. We're looking forward to next year's California Strawberry Festival! ❖

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Rally to Save the VA Property

By Laura Plotkin, District Director

On May 3, 2006, on Federal Avenue in West Los Angeles, there was an old-fashioned grassroots rally, with about a hundred placard carrying veterans and neighbors, along with some elected officials or their representatives present. Climbing up onto a folding chair, with megaphone in hand, they each called for a halt by the US Army Reserve (USAR) in their plan for the Department of Defense (DOD) property on which the VA sits under which they will exchange the property for construction or remodeling of facilities at three existing US Army Reserve sites, plus additional cash. The highest bidder for this property will not be required to provide land in exchange for this property, but simply to provide in-kind services and cash. The 10-acre USAR parcel on the VA grounds could then be used by the successful bidder for private development.



Photo by Steve Kaufman.

This has a lot of our constituents up in arms, as they understand the whole 300+-acre combined DOD/VA site is an oasis of open space, a respite in the busy Westside of Los Angeles, and a historic haven for veterans. They, as well as the family that originally donated the property, believe it should be used only for veteran-serving purposes, which the original deed supports. They fear that the exchange of this 10-acre parcel could be just the beginning of selling off bits and pieces of this soldiers'

legacy. A representative of the family which granted the property, Carolina Barrie, was at the rally. She said that the land was given to the VA as an old soldiers' home in 1888 and was not given to the federal government--which never paid for it--to be sold off. Congressman Henry Waxman and Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky are exploring options that may be available to the veterans and the community to protect this resource. Senator Kuehl supports those efforts on the state level. ♦

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provides objective, science-based health policy information to the legislature and the public. The program is funded by a capped assessment on insurance companies, and is distinctive in that it looks beyond cost impacts, and takes public health and medical impacts into account, as well. The measure has passed the Senate and will be heard next in the Assembly Health Committee.

SB 1591: Excessive Administrative Costs by Insurers

SB 1591 prohibits insurance companies from spending excessive amounts of their premium revenues on administrative expenses and gives the Department of Insurance the same tools now held by the Department of Managed Care to limit these expenses. The bill requires the Department of Insurance to establish regulations by January 1, 2008, to that effect. Nationally, we are spending \$178.7 billion dollars on administration on the payor side alone, almost as much as is spent on prescription drugs. Administrative costs are the fastest growing health expenditure in California, according to a recent report published by the

California Health Care Foundation. It is critical to provide insurance regulators with effective tools to ensure that administrative expenditures are directed toward improvements in quality and efficiency and not on risk minimization and the avoidance of legitimate claims. ♦



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Legislature Approves \$37.3 Billion Infrastructure Bond Package

*By Bill Craven, Chief Consultant
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildlife*

The Legislature works in the wee hours only rarely, but one of those occasions was early on May 6 when the Legislature voted to approve a \$37.3 billion package of infrastructure bonds to present to the voters in November. It took until 1:30 a.m. in the Senate and a few hours later than that in the Assembly, but, in the end, the Legislature decided on a \$18.9 billion transportation bond, a \$2.8 billion housing bond, a \$10.4 billion education bond, and a \$4 billion flood protection bond. Additionally, the Legislature approved a \$500 million appropriation for levee repair.

While the media correctly noted that the passage of these bonds represented a moment of bipartisanship, the content of the bonds themselves has not been fully explored. It is unfortunate, because many provisions in these bonds are important, unique, progressive, and in some cases, all of the above.

For example, the education bond has a provision for \$100 million for constructing "green" schools—those built with a commitment to energy conservation, the use of recycled materials, and avoiding the use of toxic building materials. The transportation bond contains the largest commitment ever in the state to mass transit, and it contains \$1 billion to improve air quality at our increasingly busy ports. The housing bond contains numerous innovative programs for the homeless, for foster children, for affordable housing, for farmworker housing, and to construct affordable, multifamily housing. Additionally, the housing bond contains up to \$400 million in monies available for urban and housing-related parks. The flood protection bond, while primarily focused on the San Joaquin-Sacramento river areas, will provide a real "insurance policy" to protect a major source of drinking water for Southern California.

As Senate Pro Tem Don Perata put it, the bonds are "a major down payment on 40 years of neglect of California's infrastructure, which is really the foundation for both our economy and our educational system."

In addition to the provisions mentioned above, the bonds, while certainly not perfect, contain money to enhance regional planning that should include a broader commitment to the "smart growth" principles that will make it easier to live closer to work, especially

in newly developing areas. The housing bond offers \$850 million in incentives for infill developments. The air quality provisions in the transportation bond will make a \$200 million investment in retrofitting and replacing the most polluting diesel school buses in California.

Many readers of this newsletter are aware that Senator Kuehl spent countless hours on a different bond package earlier in the year. The Natural Resources and Water Committee held a series of hearings on the financial investments that would be needed in California's water and parks systems, and the committee proposed its own version of a bond on those topics. To be brutally candid about it, there was insufficient support from Republican legislators to support Senator Kuehl's preferred resources bond. However, the pack-

...voters will also have an opportunity to approve an initiative focused on parks, resources, and water quality issues...

age that the Legislature passed, while not as strong as many of us would have liked, does represent a consensus of the highest priority investments that the state should make. In addition, Senator Kuehl has been instrumental in increasing funding for key environmental programs.

In addition to the legislative bond proposals mentioned above, which will be up for a vote on the November ballot, voters will also have an opportunity to approve an initiative focused on parks, resources, and water quality issues. This bond includes a significant portion of the environmental investment that was dropped from the legislative bond package. It was placed on the ballot by signatures of registered voters. It would provide \$5.8 billion for drinking water improvement and regional water management quality projects across the state, support for regional conservancies, such as the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and investments in ocean and marine conservation, and state and local parks. This bond would provide significant funding for land acquisition, the purchase of conservation easements, and funds for habitat protection for wildlife.

In addition to the bonds and this initiative, Senator Kuehl has proposed, and the budget subcommittee on Resources, Water, Energy and Utilities which she chairs, has adopted, an additional \$240 million for deferred maintenance for our state parks to be included in the next budget. A decision on that will be made as part of the budget negotiations to be com-

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Senator Kuehl Honored

One of 14 State Legislators Doing the Most Nationally to Promote Family-Friendly Workplaces

by Jennifer Richard, Legislative Director

To celebrate Mother's Day this year, the National Partnership for Women & Families honored Senator Sheila Kuehl for authoring a law creating the first comprehensive paid family leave insurance program in the U.S. Kuehl is among 14 state legislators around the country who were recognized for extraordinary work in promoting and securing family-friendly workplace policies.

In its new report, *State Leaders Families Can Count On*, the National Partnership for Women & Families recognized Senator Kuehl legislation that gives families real choices. California's paid family leave insurance program provides relief for workers who must take time off from paid work to care for a seriously ill family member or to bond with a newborn, adopted or foster child, by providing up to six weeks of wage replacement.

According to California's Employment Development Department, the new program has benefited more than 276,000 workers and their families since July 2004. "A broad spectrum of families, from low- to middle-income, from urban and rural areas, and small and large employers, are taking advantage of paid family leave," said Kim Krunkel, Coordinator of the Paid Family Leave Collaborative.

"Millions of Americans each year face a serious illness and rely heavily on family caregivers to help them recover from or manage these illnesses," said Kathleen Kelly, Executive Director of the Family Caregiver Alliance/National Center on Caregiving in the *State Leaders Families Can Count On* report. "More than half of these caregivers also have full-time jobs. The efforts of Senator Kuehl, with regard to both California's paid

leave legislation and CFRA (the California Family Rights Act), allow extended families to continue their important work of caring for loved ones at home, out of institutions," she said.

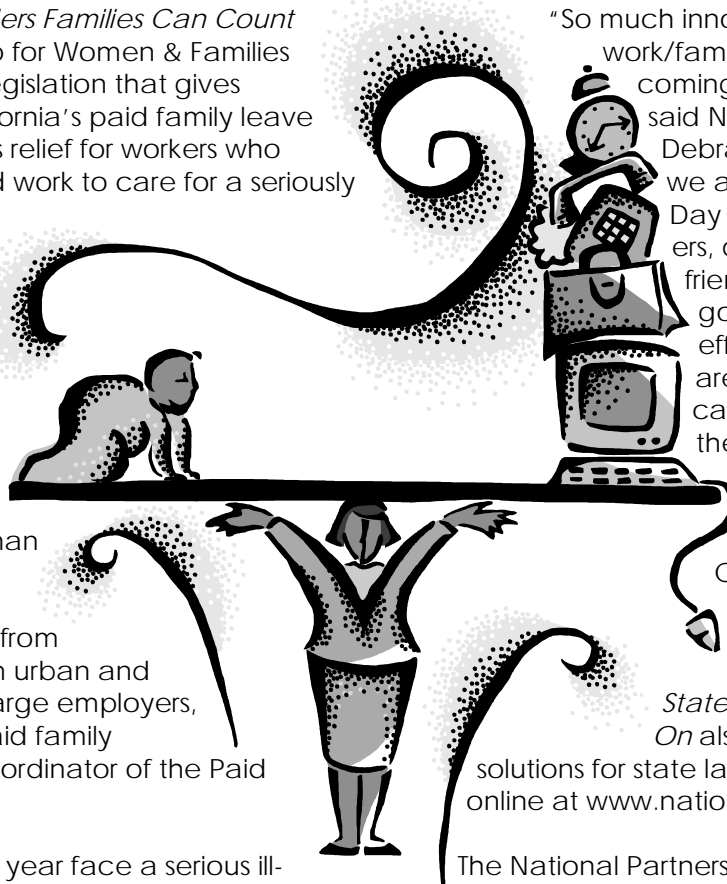
"Kuehl has been a tireless advocate for civil rights, the rights of women, children and working families for several decades," said Donna Gerber, California Nurses Association Director of Governmental Relations.

"So much innovation regarding work/family programs and policies is coming from the states right now," said National Partnership President Debra L. Ness. "The lawmakers we are honoring this Mother's Day are blazing a trail for workers, demonstrating that family-friendly workplaces are both good for families and cost-effective for employers. We are proud to honor these dedicated lawmakers, and urge their colleagues to join and support their work."

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, there are nearly 7,400 state legislators in the U.S.

State Leaders Families Can Count On also offers a menu of policy solutions for state lawmakers. It is available online at www.nationalpartnership.org.

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, access to quality health care and policies that help Americans balance work and family responsibilities. The National Partnership wrote and championed passage of the federal Family & Medical Leave Act. ❖



23rd Senate District. *The 23rd Senate District includes the cities of Agoura Hills, Beverly Hills, Calabasas, Hidden Hills, Malibu, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Santa Monica, West Hollywood and Westlake Village and the communities of Bel Air, Brentwood, Canoga Park, Encino, Hollywood, Mt. Olympus, Pacific Palisades, Sherman Oaks, Studio City, Tarzana, Topanga, West Los Angeles, West Hills, Westwood and Woodland Hills.*



Confessions of a District Director

*By Laura Plotkin, District Director
The Third in a Series*

Since my Chief of Staff (read boss), Carol Wallich, suggested that the staff participate in this series, I couldn't exactly say no to the call to be this month's featured staff member--though, I have to say a great deal of the job



of a district director is asking other staff members to put themselves out front while I spend large amounts of time pouring over piles of reports and memos and going through mail. I am sort of a district office traffic cop, directing staff members to different projects and events while attending to some regular meetings and issues, myself. There is some overlap in our staff areas of responsibility because our district is so large, but generally we have separate geographic and/or issue areas assigned to us.

As the district director, I need to be somewhat more of a generalist, but I do have certain ongoing duties. As Senator Kuehl's appointee to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, I attend those meetings monthly to keep her informed about her district's priorities for park and trail acquisitions. As her representative on Veterans' issues, I attend meetings and am working with other offices' staff members also concerned about land use issues related to proposed uses at the VA and Federal building sites. I am also the lead in the district on a number of environmental areas and spend time on water quality, toxics and watershed issues. This can include the ways in which they relate to sites of great community concern, such as the Rocketdyne/Boeing Santa Susana Field Lab (see story, Page 1). Or they can relate more generally to the many ways in which our land use decisions in this vast and quickly growing region stand to impact the protection of public health and safety. I work on other issues as well: education, business, seniors, public access, labor, children, human trafficking and people with disabilities, to name a few.

We in the district office are Senator Kuehl's eyes and ears in the district. If something happens she needs to know about, whether it is a

brush fire or a neighborhood shooting, we find out as much as possible about it so she can be made aware of the details, give us direction and be prepared when the press calls start coming in to her in Sacramento. A district office, whatever else it is, is also a complaint department! By the time our constituents call our office with a problem, they have often run out of options and patience. Sometimes they are desperate. It is our job to help with what we can, and/or steer them to other appropriate agencies or individuals who can help them solve their specific problems. We try to be kind, patient and calm. We don't please everyone but we do have a robust group of fans out there—thanks mostly to our super case workers, from whom you will hear in subsequent issues of this newsletter.

I have lots of meetings with people on Senator Kuehl's behalf, since she is in Sacramento from Sunday afternoon until Thursday evening. I bring back their concerns about legislation they like or hate, ideas they have for bills, and worries they have for education, health care, the future protection of their children with disabilities or brush clearance adjacent to their homes. Sometimes I go to events honoring the many wonderful people who are recognized: volunteer reading tutors in Beverly Hills or outstanding teachers in Woodland Hills

I love the variety of my days and the people I meet. I love that I get to keep learning new things at this time in my life.

or a myriad of others. In any given week, I may attend a DTSC (Department of Toxic Substances Control) public meeting in West Hills, a human trafficking press conference in downtown LA, a COG (Council of Governments) meeting in Calabasas, and a city reorganization meeting in Westlake Village to thank an outgoing city mayor and/or councilmember for the great work they do. I drive a lot.

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to get people appointed to local and state boards who will support what we need them to support, people who will have the public's interest at heart and in mind when they vote on issues, and we need constituents to call and write like crazy if and when they don't.

We also count on individuals and citizens' groups to let us know what is happening in their backyards so we can monitor activities at the site. We rely on support from our federal and local elected officials' offices to add their voices with pleas and demands of their federal and local agencies to continue to investigate, regulate and/or enforce laws at all levels, that is, simply to do their jobs. It takes partnership, cooperation, and awareness on all levels to combat the years of neglect, irresponsibility and indifference to the public's vulnerability and to bring about a change.

With term limits, Senator Kuehl has only two and a half years left in the state legislature to continue this fight. She has asked that I provide this series of articles as a background and road map for our constituents and fellow elected officials to go forward and carry on the struggle, knowing what the scope of the past effort has been and in the hope that no one will give up until a full and thorough EPA-standard clean-up has been accomplished. We have had administration changes in both Sacramento and Washington D.C. that have influenced the way this battle has progressed (and not progressed). The clean-up standards ordered for the site were changed from those of the higher EPA quality to the lower DOE quality. At the very least, we must push our federal officials to demand the higher level of clean-up at the site, and ask them to push for a re-evaluation and re-authorization of it as a superfund site.

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things at this time in my life. I bemoan the fact that I can never know enough of one thing to feel like I am really an expert, but I enjoy the ongoing education and I try to forgive myself for not having more time to know more and a bigger brain to fit it into.

I like that I was the first person Senator Kuehl hired after she got elected to the State Assembly almost 12 years ago, and I like that I am still here. I like that I represent a person who is smart and funny and kind and courageous, which allows me the opportunity to be well received when I go out into the world to represent her. I like the wonderful and diverse group of people I work with, which feels more like a family than a group of co-workers. Most of all, I like the opportunity of public service in the most diverse set of experiences I have ever had. ❖

**Read the entire
Rocketdyne Test Site series
online at www.sen.ca.gov/kuehl**

**Part I: The Present and Past History of the
Rocketdyne Test Site (March 2006)**

**Part II: The Defeat of Legislation to Clean-Up
the Rocketdyne Test Site (April 2006)**

**Part III: The History of Health Risks
Associated with the Rocketdyne Test Site
(May 2006)**

**Part IV: The Rocketdyne Test Site: What Can
Be Done (June 2006)**

We have often heard that "all politics is local." This issue has stayed alive for so long because people have been, and have stayed, actively involved. You may learn more and share your thoughts by attending the SSFL Workgroup meetings/public hearings, which occur quarterly in Simi Valley (<http://committeetobridgethegap.org>) and you may call John Beach at Cal-EPA at (415) 972-3347 to be put on the SSFL workgroup mailing list for the meetings and/or visit the www.rocketdynewatch.org website for other related information. Staying involved is half the battle. We don't have the perfect answer or strategy for how to accomplish a high-standard clean-up at the site, but we know there needs to be one, and we all have to be a part of continuing to push to make that happen. ❖

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pleted in June. Her work on the budget also resulted in proposals to increase the pay for wardens at the Department of Fish and Game, to provide more personnel to the beleaguered marine and ocean division at that same department, and to provide additional funding for the California Coastal Commission, including the use of webcasting to provide greater public access to the meetings of the commission.

It is important to consider all aspects of state spending—the budget together with the proposed bonds—to get an accurate picture of what is happening in Sacramento and what the potential is for investing in these key areas in the future. ❖